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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002311

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CONTINUES DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENTIAL  
HOPEFUL SENATOR MANUEL "MAR" ROXAS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 3 private breakfast, Senator Manuel "Mar" Roxas and the Ambassador discussed Roxas's presidential aspirations and the current state of play among candidates in the run up to the 2010 elections. Roxas was candid in the assessment of his rivals and of President Arroyo's challenges in her remaining months. The Ambassador and Roxas discussed the U.S. presidential elections, with the Ambassador emphasizing that U.S.-Philippine relations would stay strong, regardless of the outcome. On the situation in Mindanao, the Ambassador said it was important for the government to keep an open dialogue with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), even as it continued to pursue rogue MILF commanders who were responsible for instigating the recent hostilities with the Philippine Armed Forces in Mindanao. Roxas queried the Ambassador on the role of U.S. troops in the southern Philippines and thanked the Ambassador for the opportunity to learn more about USG military activities in the region. The meeting concluded with Roxas raising the case of former Philippine Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jocjoc Bolante's request for asylum in the United States. The Ambassador advised Roxas that any communication to the USG on the Bolante case should originate with the Arroyo administration. END SUMMARY.

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PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS  
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12. (C) During a private breakfast October 3, the Ambassador had a lively and engaging meeting with presidential hopeful Senator Manuel "Mar" Roxas on a variety of topics. Roxas was eager to discuss his presidential campaign, saying he felt that 2010 was his one chance at the presidency. He believed he was well qualified and could do the job, but had trouble getting media coverage and said television ads were going to be expensive. Roxas said that only Senate President Manuel Villar had the funds to buy television time at this stage and that former president Joseph Estrada and Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson were more likely to play spoiler roles instead of running serious campaigns, with the winner owing them for their support. The key to victory, Roxas said, would be convincing the lower classes that the person running had their interests at heart. Roxas confided to the Ambassador that he was not sure how he personally would tackle that problem, given that his Wharton MBA and ten years on Wall Street as an investment banker did not "exactly call to the common man."

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ARROYO WILL CONTINUE TO FACE CHALLENGES  
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13. (C) Roxas was candid in his assessment of President Arroyo's challenges during her last 18 months in office. He said Arroyo would have trouble avoiding lawsuits, but did not think she would try to stay on beyond her term. Roxas said it was more likely that Administration supporters wanted her to remain in office, as they were worried about their legal fate once the presidency changed hands. The Ambassador suggested that it would be best for the Philippines if the new government would focus on solving domestic and international problems and not on the politics of retribution. Roxas said that whoever was elected probably would want to pursue such a conciliatory course, but that public pressure might build to act against Arroyo as it had in the case of former president Estrada. Referring to Arroyo's order to have Estrada arrested on corruption charges in April 2001, Roxas said Arroyo had not wanted to confront Estrada, but that the pressure had reached a point that she had to take action or risk being tainted as an Estrada crony in the corruption scandals he faced.

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"FASCINATED BY U.S. ELECTIONS"  
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14. (C) Turning to U.S. election politics, Roxas said he had been fascinated by the campaign styles and strategies of the two U.S. presidential candidates. In particular, Roxas said he was interested in the U.S. focus on ethics and financial disclosure by the candidates, subjects that received far less attention in Philippine elections. The Ambassador took the opportunity to note that U.S.-Philippine relations would remain strong regardless of who was elected president.

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MINDANAO A CONCERN  
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15. (C) The Ambassador stressed to Roxas that the USG was concerned about the situation in Mindanao and how it was affecting the civilian population and the broader prospects for peace. The Ambassador voiced USG concerns that the current fighting could widen, trapping the Philippine military and police in a fight that was more protracted and costly than they had envisioned. Keeping dialogue open with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was key to any future peace negotiations, the Ambassador said. She underscored that it was essential for the MILF leadership to be seen as a credible interlocutor if the peace process was to move forward. Roxas raised the aborted Memorandum of Agreement between the government and the MILF, and the Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. had no role in the negotiations, but that we strongly support both sides reaching an agreement that produces a durable peace in the southern Philippines. Roxas agreed that peace was important and lamented the negative impact that the renewed violence was having on investment in Mindanao.

16. (C) Roxas was under the impression that U.S. troops had a clandestine role in the Philippines and was reassured by the Ambassador's clear message that the USG was in the Philippines strictly at the invitation of government to assist in counterterrorism efforts, military training, and humanitarian assistance. Roxas thanked the Ambassador for a straightforward description of U.S. activities and was appreciative of her openness about a topic he had mistakenly perceived to be sensitive and not open to discussion.

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BOLANTE CASE  
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17. (C) Roxas raised the asylum petition of former Philippine Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jocjoc Bolante, currently under detention in the United States.

Bolante's petition was denied by the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals on August 27. Roxas mentioned to the Ambassador that no charges had been filed against Bolante in the Philippines. The Ambassador said she appreciated his input on the case, but that any official correspondence on Bolante's situation should come from the Arroyo government and that she hoped Roxas was in touch with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs.

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COMMENT  
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¶18. Personable, articulate, and intelligent, Roxas has proven to be an engaging and open interlocutor. He appears eager to build a close relationship with the Embassy and seemed genuinely to enjoy his conversation with the Ambassador. As a powerful Senator with the education, pedigree, and savvy to be the next president of the Philippines, he bears close watching, although his electability remains an unknown. Regardless of whether he wins in 2010, Senator Roxas will continue to be an important figure in Philippine politics and someone with whom the USG can work with closely in the future.

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BIOGRAPHIC NOTES  
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¶19. Manuel A. Roxas II was born May 13, 1957, to former Senator Gerardo Roxas and socialite-philanthropist Judy Araneta-Roxas. He has been in the Senate since 2004. Previously, he was Secretary of Trade and Industry from 1998-2003 and a congressman from the 1st District of Capiiz in the Visayas region of the Philippines from 1992-2001. He is an opposition senator affiliated with the Liberal Party. His election as party president was a move to lay the groundwork for a 2010 presidential bid. Senator Roxas is single, but has a son from a previous relationship. Roxas earned an economics degree at the Wharton School of Business and pursued post-graduate studies at the Kennedy School of Government before working as an investment banker on Wall Street for almost a decade. He is the grandson of the first president of the independent Philippine Republic, Manuel Roxas.  
KENNEY